

ILLITERACY IN VIRGINIA

SOME FACTS WHICH CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED



This old lady is the grandmother of forty-three mountain children, most of whom have but recently enjoyed school facilities.

PREPARED BY
E. R. CHESTERMAN,
Secretary of the State Board of Education.

PUBLISHED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION



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Illiteracy in Virginia.

In 1910 there were 71,580,270 persons 10 years of age or over in the United States, of whom 5,516,163 were unable to read or write, constituting 7.7 per cent. of the population.

The native whites, who constituted 75.0 per cent. of the entire population, had the smallest number of illiterates, 1,534,272, or 3.0 per cent.

The foreign born whites had 1,650,361 illiterates, or 12.7 per cent. of their number.

The colored had 2,227,731 illiterates, or 30.4 per cent.

Astonishing as are these figures to the average reader of this "enlightened age," one is apt to view them with pretty much the same degree of complacency that one views other statistical figures relating to the United States. This complacency, however, is soon turned into something almost akin to horror when the figures are analyzed and their exact significance is realized. Then, indeed, we see that the evil is at our very doors and then, too, we almost hear the pathetic appeals of those who grope in mental darkness.

Virginia's Startling Figures.

To put the situation concretely—to bring it "straight home" to the Virginia people—it may be said that out of the 3,184,633 white illiterates over 10 years of age, Virginia furnished 83,825. Of these 83,825, 2,368 were foreign born and 352 were of foreign or mixed parents. More lamentable still, 81,105 of the 83,825 were native born whites, while 18,047 were children.

And out of the 2,331,530 negro illiterates Virginia furnished 148,950.

In 1910 there were 21,917 children (white and colored) between the ages of 10 and 14 inclusive, who could neither read nor write—9.4 per cent. of the total of 232,775 illiterates in the State

The United States census of 1910, shows that Virginia's illiteracy at that time was 8.2 per cent. among whites, 30 per cent. among negroes, and 15.2 per cent. for the State at large. The correspond-

ing figures for 1900 were 11.4 per cent. whites, 44 per cent. colored and 22.9 per cent. in all.

A perceptible decrease, say you? Yes, a perceptible decrease but hardly a satisfactory one; in truth a most disappointing and humiliating decrease.

That Virginia must bestir herself is obvious; that she will bestir herself may also be taken for granted since the stain on her escutcheon is almost unendurable. Wonders in the way of removing this stain may be accomplished before the taking of the next census. The efforts of the Commonwealth, however, will have to be directed chiefly towards helping the young—those still of school age.

And here it may be well to explain that of the great body of illiterates in Virginia, 46,831, according to the Federal census, are between the ages of 10 and 20 inclusive, while the State census—that taken by the school authorities, ages 10 to 19 inclusive—makes the figure even larger, to-wit, 55,682.

Of the 55,682 illiterates (Virginia census, 10 to 19 inclusive) 52,662 are in the counties and of the total number in both counties and cities, 24,344 are white.

The negroes in Virginia reduced their illiteracy 33 per cent. during the decade between 1900 to 1910, but the whites brought about a reduction of only 29 per cent. It would, therefore, seem from this that a certain State educator was not far amiss when he said, "The negro situation will take care of itself if we keep the native white statistics constantly before our eyes."

Some Comparisons.

Some, perhaps, will seek to derive consolation by comparing Virginia's illiteracy statistics with those of other States. Well, let them do so if they can, though the consolation, at best, will not be great.

Native white illiteracy in all the New England States, for example, averages less than one per cent.; in Virginia there are only two cities, Charlottesville and Newport News, and one county, Powhatan, in which the illiteracy of native whites is less than one per cent. In our largest class, including as it does thirty-seven counties and four cities, the rate of native white illiteracy is be-



Virginia's State Superintendent "pedalling" to reach a remote school district.



This army of Pittsylvania county school children is helping to fight illiteracy in their section.

tween five and ten per cent. Careful consideration of the following table is invited:

Virginia.

<i>Illiteracy Among Native Whites</i>	No. of Counties	No. of Cities
Less than one per cent.....	1.....	2
One to two per cent.....	6.....	6
Two to five per cent.....	23.....	5
Five to ten per cent.....	37.....	4
Ten to fifteen per cent.....	22	
Fifteen to twenty per cent.....	9	
Twenty-eight and seven-tenths per cent.....	1	
Thirty-four and three-tenths per cent... ..	1	
Unreported		1
Total	100	18

If we follow the boundary lines of this Commonwealth we shall find the facts given in the following table:

District of Columbia	0.6 per cent.
Maryland	3.0 per cent.
West Virginia	6.7 per cent.
Virginia	8.0 per cent.
Tennessee	9.9 per cent.
Kentucky	10.7 per cent.
North Carolina	12.3 per cent.

What North Carolina Is Doing.

The native illiteracy of North Carolina still exceeds that of Virginia, but the "Old North State" is gaining on us very rapidly. We reduced our native white illiteracy 29 per cent. during the decade immediately preceding 1910; North Carolina's record of reduction was 36 per cent. This is difficult to understand because North Carolina's average length of school term is considerably less than ours—90 days as against 140 days. The most probable explanations are the priority of her educational revival and the use she makes of local teacher's associations. In North Carolina the teachers meet every month and discuss boys and girls as well



Visitors' day at the pretty little school of the Pamunkey Indians in King William county.



Teachers and pupils of Irish Creek Hollow School, Rockbridge county. Only six children are beyond the first reader and none beyond the fifth reader.

as lesson plans and the latest subjects to be taught. If a boy or girl is out of school or irregular in attendance, the case comes up for special consideration at the teachers' meeting. Besides, the educational revival in North Carolina antedated ours and if Virginia could have made during the first half of the ten years following 1900 such strides as have been made since 1905, there would have been another story to tell at this point of our narrative. North Carolina now has compulsory education and will reduce her rate of illiteracy more rapidly than ever before.

The Fight in Other States.

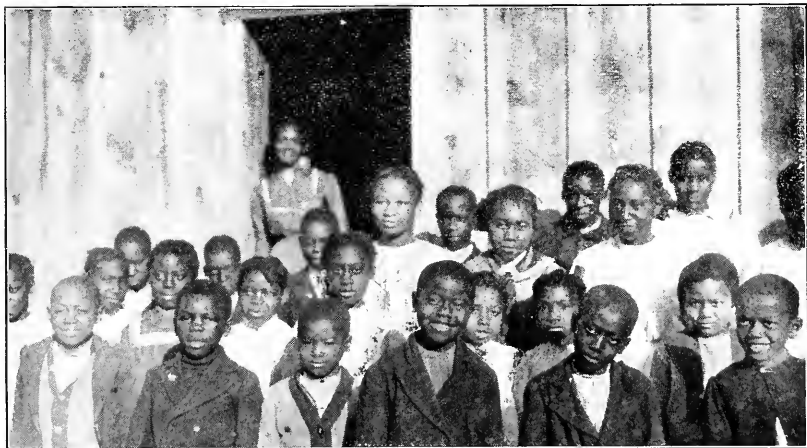
During the decade which has been mentioned the Pacific States reduced illiteracy among their native white population as much as 50 per cent., the Mountain States of the west 49 per cent., and all the other great divisions of States about 40 per cent., except our group, the South Atlantic States, and the East South Central and New England groups. The South Atlantic States reduced illiteracy 33 per cent., the East South Central 26 and the New England 22 per cent. Omitting the New England States, where the rate of illiteracy has long been very low, it is clear that our group of States is next to the bottom of the list in the matter of reducing illiteracy during the decade.

Going within the South Atlantic group itself, we find that Delaware and Florida reduced their illiteracy among native whites 47 and 42 per cent. respectively; Maryland, West Virginia and North Carolina about 3 per cent. each; and Virginia next to the last in the list, only 29 per cent., as above stated.

To those who desire to make further comparisons between the figures relating to illiteracy in Virginia and those relating to illiteracy in other States, we offer the following tables, which were prepared by Inspector William H. Hand, of South Carolina, and which appear in the excellent bulletin on "Compulsory School Attendance" recently published by the United States Bureau of Education:



Exhibit of the Laurel Industrial School, where 250 erring boys are being saved from a life of ignorance and crime.



We are smiling because we've been given a chance to become self-supporting, useful men and women. Neglect us, and by our ignorance we will hold back our community.

EXHIBIT A.

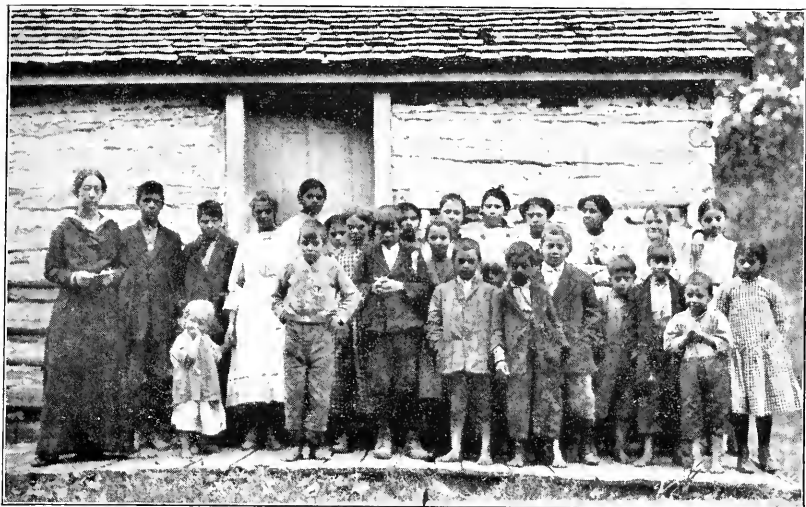
Showing rank of the twelve States without State-wide compulsory laws in percentage of illiteracy of native whites 10 years of age and over.

STATES	1910	1900
Maryland.....	32d	32d
Texas.....	33rd	35th
Florida.....	37th	38th
Mississippi.....	38th	37th
Arkansas.....	40th	41st
Georgia.....	41st	42d
Virginia.....	42d	40th
Tennessee.....	43rd	46th
Alabama.....	44th	47th
South Carolina.....	45th	44th
North Carolina.....	47th	49th
Louisiana.....	48th	48th

EXHIBIT B.

Native white male illiterates of voting age.

STATES	Illiterates in 1900	Illiterates in 1910	Per cent. in 1910
South Carolina.....	15,643	17,535	11.0
Georgia.....	31,914	29,936	8.9
Florida.....	5,470	5,026	5.1
Alabama.....	30,680	30,389	10.9
Mississippi.....	11,613	11,129	6.1
Texas.....	24,180	23,642	3.7
Maryland.....	10,191	8,097	4.0
Virginia.....	35,057	33,488	9.9
North Carolina.....	24,208	49,619	14.1
Tennessee.....	51,247	47,479	11.5
Arkansas.....	22,546	20,343	7.7
Louisiana.....	24,681	28,091	15.6
Massachusetts.....	1,927	1,700	.5
Rhode Island.....	550	466	1.0
Connecticut.....	1,040	893	.7
Wisconsin.....	1,754	1,514	1.0
Minnesota.....	737	732	.5
West Virginia.....	23,024	20,666	7.8
Kentucky.....	62,182	59,314	12.8



An Indian school in a mountain section.



These folks have come to the colored school fair in Campbell county.

EXHIBIT C.

Native white children between 6 and 14 years of age not in school.

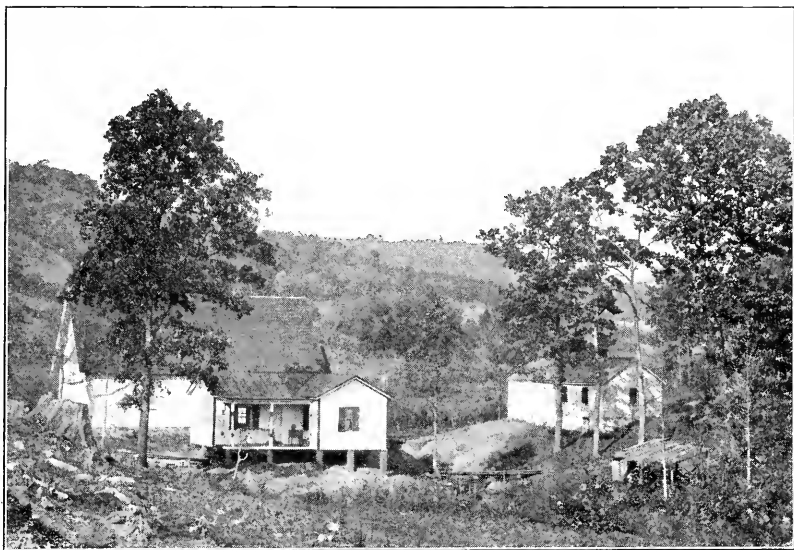
STATES	Children	Per cent.
Maryland.....	25,157	16.7
Virginia.....	74,505	26.8
North Carolina.....	79,261	24.3
Tennessee.....	97,071	24.8
Arkansas.....	60,231	25.3
Louisiana.....	58,197	31.6
South Carolina.....	39,977	27.9
Georgia.....	76,342	25.2
Florida.....	21,854	27.9
Alabama.....	78,142	30.0
Mississippi.....	26,730	15.8
Texas.....	151,232	25.7

EXHIBIT D.

Native white illiterates 10 years of age and over.

STATES	Illiterates	Per cent.
South Carolina.....	50,112	10.5
Georgia.....	79,875	8.0
Florida.....	14,331	5.2
Alabama.....	84,204	10.1
Mississippi.....	28,344	5.3
Texas.....	60,881	3.3
Maryland.....	17,464	3.0
Virginia.....	81,105	8.2
North Carolina.....	131,992	12.3
Tennessee.....	120,384	9.9
Arkansas.....	54,221	7.1
Louisiana.....	82,160	15.0
Massachusetts.....	3,428	0.4
Rhode Island.....	944	0.7
Connecticut.....	1,707	.5
Wisconsin.....	3,223	.6
Minnesota.....	1,536	.4
West Virginia.....	50,580	6.7
Kentucky.....	145,156	10.7

In Exhibit D, the first six States mentioned have no compulsory attendance law. Next are shown the six States with local-option compulsory laws. Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut are taken as representatives of New England, each with a compulsory attendance law enacted years ago. Wisconsin and Minnesota are taken as a type of the newer West, with a somewhat rigid enforcement of compulsory attendance. West Virginia and Kentucky are taken as specimens of States recently adopting attendance laws at first mild in form and not rigidly enforced.



A church, a school, and a teacher's home in an Indian settlement in the hills. The schoolhouse stands to the right and the teacher's cottage in the foreground.



A canning club that is much in earnest.

EXHIBIT E.

Showing the actual decrease of native white illiterates 10 years of age and over, between 1900 and 1910.

STATES	In 1900	In 1910	Decrease
South Carolina.....	54,177	50,112	4,065
Georgia.....	99,948	79,875	20,073
Florida.....	16,470	14,331	2,139
Alabama.....	102,779	84,204	18,575
Mississippi.....	35,432	28,344	7,088
Texas.....	70,006	60,881	9,125
Maryland.....	23,837	17,464	6,373
Virginia.....	95,583	81,105	14,478
North Carolina.....	175,325	131,992	43,333
Tennessee.....	156,342	120,384	35,958
Arkansas.....	74,828	54,221	20,607
*Louisiana.....	78,889	82,160	3,201

*Increase in Louisiana.

It will readily be seen from the foregoing figures and comparative tables that no effort has been made to disguise the facts concerning illiteracy as it prevails in Virginia. The present situation is one which requires the plain, unvarnished truth, however humiliating that truth may be. Fortunately, however, there is much which may yet be done to "save the day," and better still, the people at large have begun to realize this. For months past a mighty fight to wipe out the blot has been waged and even now Virginia is in the midst of a battle against illiteracy which is certain to reduce the evil materially. This battle is everybody's fight—the school authorities', the school patrons', the churches', the good citizens', the children's, yea, even yours and mine. It affects practically every neighborhood in the State; upon its success depends the future peace and happiness of many a Virginia hearthside, for illiteracy is the synonym of poverty and shiftlessness.

Here, in brief form, are some plans of procedure that, in one way or the other, will enable all the people to help in the campaign against illiteracy:

1. Every division superintendent in every city and county in Virginia should study the situation in his own field and work indefatigably to stamp out the evil. This alone will mean a working force of 113, who by constant supervision and visitation, can accomplish wonders. All the superintendents, by the way, would do well to imitate the example of the oft mentioned county superintendent who "keeps track of every white child in his division" and takes

pains to see that the child is at least entered long enough to learn to read and write.

2. Every school trustee, school principal and school teacher should do likewise in his or her more limited sphere. And here it may be said that the problems of enrollment and average attendance are so closely related that we may say that all constitute phases of the same problem. Teachers and principals alike should



A mountain cabin. The people in this settlement have never had good schools or a fair chance to develop their possibilities.

strive assiduously not only to procure the largest possible enrollments but also the largest possible daily attendance.

3. Every parent, however great may be the self-sacrifice in so doing, should not only send his own children to school but should enforce their regular attendance. He would not go far amiss, either, if he persuaded all his neighbors to imitate his example

4. Every school league and citizens' association should feel in duty bound to join in the great crusade. Such organizations have exceptional opportunities for usefulness in their respective neighborhoods. They can do intensive work that is bound to be effective in stamping out illiteracy. Better still, their moral support will stimulate the teachers, as well as school authorities.

5. Every neighborhood with twenty-five or more children should have a school within reasonable distance. The wagons used

for hauling pupils to consolidated schools have served an excellent purpose and their discontinuance would be a calamitous thing. In some instances, however, their use is impracticable. Cases of this sort should be met by carrying the school to the children. And here it may be remarked that, despite the popularity and success of the consolidated school, the one-room rural school still has its usefulness. It is far from being an effete institution. In truth, there has seldom been a time when it could accomplish more good or when the benefits accruing from it were more widely recognized.

6. Every community which finds itself exceptionally beset by the "curse" of illiteracy should ponder the advisability of establishing summer schools. These would certainly be practicable in counties that enjoy the bracing atmosphere of the mountains or unusual altitudes.

7. Every school division of the State, whether comprising a county or city, should consider the possible benefits that might follow the adoption of our compulsory education law. The Virginia statute enacted six years ago contains a local option feature that puts it within the power of every school division to avail itself of the law if it sees fit so to do. While the statute undoubtedly contains certain provisions that lessen its strength, the law has been followed with very satisfactory results by several counties and cities. It is directly in the line of progress: it can be made to do invaluable service in the way of increasing enrollment and reducing illiteracy.

The old adage, "What's everybody's business is nobody's business," assuredly fails to find application in the matter of Virginia's illiterates. No man with a spark of humanity in his soul can fail to realize that the Old Dominion should rid herself of this baneful shadow that has fallen athwart our proud Commonwealth; no man with a proper sense of citizenship can fail to understand that he must do his part towards uprooting the evil; no man with the smallest idea of proportion can fail to see the importance of carrying education almost to the threshold of every Virginia home. The appeal for help from every quarter is a Macedonian cry; it cannot be ignored. We cannot deafen our ears to it.

Let no man fail to hear; let every man be up and doing.

An Effort to Abolish Illiteracy in Richmond

By DR. J. A. C. CHANDLER, *Superintendent of Richmond City Schools.*

Among the native whites in Richmond only 12 out of every 1,000 are unable to read and write. The average for cities in the United States having 100,000 population is 4 out of every 1,000, while the average in Virginia is 80 whites out of every 1,000. In proportion to its population Richmond has six times less illiteracy than the rest of the State.

Considering the negroes of Richmond there are 196 illiterates out of every 1,000 ten years of age and over. The average for the cities of the United States having 100,000 population and over is 126, while the average for Virginia is nearly 300. In proportion to the population Richmond, as compared with the State at large, has one and one-half times less illiterates among the negroes.



A class of foreigners at Bellevue School learning to read and write.

For the last two years great effort has been made to abolish illiteracy by means of the night schools. At present there are in the night schools of Richmond 3,548 persons, of whom a vast majority are beyond school age. The minimum age at which persons are admitted to these schools is 14. The total number in night schools is distributed as follows: White 2,167, colored 1,381. The classes as organized run from the first grade to the second year of high school.

Of the 2,167 whites, 852 are in academic work from the first year of the elementary schools to the second year of high school, while 1,315 are in vocational work, commercial work and work in household arts.

Of the 1,381 in the colored night schools 997 are included from first to seventh year academic work, while 384 are taking courses in industrial work and household arts.

The Richmond School Board thinks that a person who has not completed the fifth reader grade, or the equivalent, is not to be classed far above illiteracy. In the night schools for whites there are enrolled in the fifth grade and below as follows:



A class of adults who are earnestly studying the subjects included in elementary school work—some as low as the primary grades.

WHITE NIGHT SCHOOLS.

	Males		Females		Total	
	Under 21	Over 21	Under 21	Over 21	Under 21	Over 21
5th Grade.....	108	1	51	1	159	2
4th Grade.....	61		43	1	104	1
3rd Grade.....	36	6	28	8	64	14
2nd Grade.....	17	2	5	1	22	3
1st Grade.....	15	7	2	3	17	10
	237	16	129	14	366	30

An analysis of the above table shows that there are 396 out of 852 who are in the 5th Reader or below. It must be remem-

bered, too, that all of these are over 14 years of age. The total whites in the 1st Reader grade are 27; in the 2nd Reader grade 25; in the 3rd Reader grade 78, and in the 4th Reader grade 105. Note also that there are 10 white persons over 21 years of age in 1st Reader grade; 3 in 2nd Reader grade and 14 in the 3rd Reader grade.

In the night schools for colored there are enrolled in the 5th Reader grade and below as follows:



A class at the Baker Night School studying Playmates Primer.

COLORED NIGHT SCHOOLS.

	Males		Females		Total	
	Under 21	Over 21	Under 21	Over 21	Under 21	Over 21
5th Grade.....	46	22	45	11	91	33
4th Grade.....	67	39	40	37	107	76
3rd Grade.....	63	47	33	56	96	103
2nd Grade.....	57	58	48	76	105	134
1st Grade.....	29	45	31	96	60	141
	262	211	197	276	459	487

It will be observed that of the 997 colored persons in academic work, 946 are in the 5th Reader grade or below, and all of these are over 14 years of age. It will be interesting also to note that 487 of them are over 21, many of them being from 50 to 60 years of age. Of the colored in the 1st Reader grade there are 201; in



the 2nd Reader grade 239; in the 3rd Reader grade a vast majority are 30 to 35 years of age.

The effort to remove illiteracy in Richmond is not simply an effort to teach reading and writing—it is an effort to give higher ideals and to furnish some food for thought, thus preventing the illiterate mind from turning towards mischief-making and vice.



A class at the Baker Night School of the second reader grade learning Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.

The white night schools are conducted for six and one-half months, 2 hours per night, Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. The colored night schools are conducted for six and one-half months on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 2 hours per night.

It is a real joy to visit the night schools and see the eagerness of the students, old and young, and to inspect the efforts which they are making to overcome the difficulties of life which they are facing because of lack of opportunity or training in early life. It should be said that practically every person of the 3,547 enrolled in the Richmond City Night Schools is in the day engaged in some gainful occupation.

Instance after instance could be cited to show the great value of this work, but one will suffice. A messenger connected with an important State department (a man about 35 years of age) who three years ago could scarcely read in the 3rd Reader has, by night work for three successive years, learned to read with some degree of ease; learned the fundamental operations of arithmetic with great accuracy, and is able to use the typewriter in addressing envelopes and in tabulating. His efficiency, in the judgment of the

office in which he works, has been increased during the three years 100 per cent.

The Richmond authorities do not believe that anything is really accomplished in the night schools by merely teaching reading and writing, unless it is constantly applied in daily work, and those who have an opportunity to attend the night schools must be given a broader grasp as to their duties in society. The night schools are, therefore, used as a great community activity for the promotion of personal efficiency and public good.



The above is a class of journeymen studying estimating, reading blue prints, and other problems connected with their trade. This is one type of a number of schools in operation in Richmond for the improvement of the worker in the occupation.

A Few Suggestions

Illiteracy is the common enemy of us all.

To be unable either to read or write is to be mentally blind, deaf and dumb.

"An illiterate taught is a citizen emancipated, ennobled, elevated."

Our "army of illiterates" is but a phantom host in the matter of useful citizenship.

Let us strive to make the illiterate an extinct type of humanity in Virginia by 1920.

If education be "an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity," then illiteracy must be hideous, unending despair.

Virginia may boast of being the "Mother of Presidents" but she cannot brag about her illiterate children.

"The very spring and root of honesty and virtue lie in the felicity of lighting on good education."—Plutarch

"It was in making education not only common to all, but in some sense compulsory on all that the destiny of the free republics of America was practically settled."—James Russell Lowell.